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TAGS: PREL NATO MARR PGOV FR  
SUBJECT: SARKOZY SUPPORTS NATO INTEGRATION; FORMAL  
ANNOUNCEMENT EXPECTED AFTER PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE

Classified By: Political Counselor Kathleen Allegrone, for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶11. (SBU) Summary and comment: A think tank seminar held March 11 on "France, European Defense and NATO in the 21st Century" was the setting for an all-star line-up of French Ministers and political elite to promote France's reintegration into the military command of NATO. President Sarkozy capped a day of speeches by other officials to promote NATO, European defense and French reintegration to a largely sympathetic domestic crowd. The GOF officials took turns de-bunking the arguments against NATO reintegration, by advocating practical considerations and overruling emotional and ideological references to DeGaulle. President Sarkozy's closing speech was a passionate and pointed defense of his policy position in favor of France's "return to its full place" within NATO. That said, he stopped short of a formal declaration, in deference to next week's parliamentary debate and vote, which will be led by PM Fillon.

¶12. (C) Summary and comment continued: Although President Sarkozy has the sole constitutional authority to make the decision on NATO reintegration, he repeatedly stressed his government's "open" and "transparent" approach, starting from his own campaign speeches and culminating in the parliamentary debate scheduled for March 17. Although the debate may be more of a democratic fig leaf than a genuine influence on a policy decision, Sarkozy's approach is a significant departure from that of previous French presidents who historically never included parliamentary consultation as an element in momentous strategic decisions. That said, it was clear from the passionate arguments and careful staging of the event that President Sarkozy's decision is already made, even if the domestic political process will not be complete until next week. Although Sarkozy technically held back from a formal declaration of fait accompli, Post considers this speech to be an announcement in all but name. An outline of the principal arguments made by President Sarkozy in his speech follows below. End summary and comment.

-- (SBU) In a speech laden with frank speaking and pointed references, President Sarkozy made clear his rationale for French reintegration into the NATO military command, while acknowledging that consultations within France are still ongoing. He stressed the importance of debate and transparency in a democratic society, noting the steps that France has taken to encourage a full discussion of the issue, while reminding his audience that constitutionally the power of decision remains in his hands. He noted that the discussion is also part of a long process to better inform the French public of France's historic and current role in the Alliance. He stressed that a solitary nation has no influence and that France's friends and family are, above all, anchored in the values of the West. To best ensure its security in today's world, France needs a strong defense, a

strong Europe and a strong Alliance.

-- (SBU) He recognized the importance of national defense capabilities and elaborated on his efforts to improve and modernize them. The world has changed: the Bosnia crisis was resolved mainly thanks to U.S. force; the Georgia crisis was resolved mainly through European diplomacy. ESDP is an absolute priority and Sarkozy pledged to continue to reinforce European capabilities because a grand economic power without military force is a weak political actor -- and he noted that the U.S. agrees with this analysis. Distrust on France's objectives in strengthening ESDP had for too long led to perceived tensions between strengthening European security and strengthening transatlantic security. This too has changed, for example, with the UK currently commanding its first ESDP mission. Sarkozy linked the transatlantic and European security relationships by recalling the U.S. interventions in Europe in WWI and WWII and observing that 21 of 27 members of the European Union are also in NATO.

-- (SBU) Normalizing France's relationship with NATO will increase France's independence by increasing its presence and influence within the alliance. In a reference to some of the more spurious arguments against NATO reintegration, Sarkozy stated that the debate on NATO must be based on facts. France is a founding member of NATO and has remained a member for 60 years. The alliance remains a central element of France's national defense and security policy. France is also participating in the transformation of the alliance, for example through the NATO Reaction Force. In some of his harshest language, Sarkozy said that efforts to deny these basic facts constitute "shameful lies." NATO decisions will still need to be made unanimously (citing

French and German opposition in 2008 to MAP for Ukraine and Georgia as examples of the primacy of national decisions within the Alliance).

-- (SBU) Sarkozy's speech was filled with references to France's lengthy process towards reintegration, specifically citing steps taken over the years by leaders from both sides of the political spectrum, such as Chirac and Mitterrand. France rejoined the military committee under Chirac and since 2004 has participated in the integrated military structures (and noted with pride that since that time the French flag has flown over the Brussels Headquarters). France hopes to turn the NATO of tomorrow into a more efficient operation, to re-build the NATO relationship with Russia and is working with Germany on a new strategic concept.

-- (SBU) He also emphasized France's independence, saying that France will be more powerful when it can co-direct decisions rather than submit to other countries, decisions. He further stated that Europe must be fully present in discussions about its security and not leave the field to the U.S. and Russia to decide. According to him, Europe needs France in order to play its full role in NATO. In addition, French normalization in NATO will allow for a better balance between Europe and the U.S. within the Alliance. He affirmed that France's armed forces are, and will remain, national forces, ridiculing the idea of a "supranational" force that no longer answers to its leaders. France will of course maintain its independent nuclear deterrent, just as the UK or the U.S. would never put their nuclear weapons under the control of a committee. Nuclear discussions may take place, but strategic decisions will remain national.

-- (SBU) Sarkozy took pains to emphasize the government's effort to allow an open, full and transparent debate, in keeping with a democratic society. He reminded his audience that he could have negotiated in secret and made a unilateral decision, rather than engaging in a lengthy process of consultation with experts, the Parliament, and others. He vowed that defense strategies can be modernized without betraying ideals of de Gaulle. For example, de Gaulle rejected the NPT and all non-proliferation treaties, a stance at odds with France's positions today. De Gaulle also rejected hosting foreign troops in France although today

France and Germany are planning to station a joint Franco-German brigade in France. Likewise, France is updating defense accords with Africa as an effort to modernize its force posture.

-- (SBU) Normalizing the relationship with NATO is just one step in an ongoing process that will continue on March 17. Sarkozy said that after the debate, he would write to the Allies to let them know of France's decision and will hold follow-up meetings in Strasbourg. Sarkozy expressed "total confidence" in PM Fillon, who will lead the debate and stressed that it is appropriate to consider France's relationship to NATO within the broader framework of France's foreign policy.

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